



Front Country Trails Multi-Jurisdictional Task Force

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AGENDA DATE: April 4, 2007

TO: Front Country Trails Multi-Jurisdictional Task Force

FROM: Kathy Frye, Natural Areas Planner, City of Santa Barbara
Kerry Kellogg, Recreation Specialist, Los Padres National Forest
Claude Garciacelay, Park Planner, County of Santa Barbara

SUBJECT: Existing Conditions – Trail Conditions, Maintenance and Current Funding – For Information

RECOMMENDATION: That the FCT Multi-Jurisdictional Task Force (Task Force) receive a presentation on the existing trail conditions, maintenance and current funding.

DISCUSSION:

Introduction

The purpose of this staff report is to outline and review the Task Force Work Plan topic area that was scheduled for the April 4, 2007 Regular Meeting. The topic, Existing Conditions, is comprised of several categories that will be covered over four consecutive months during the April, May, June and July Task Force meetings. The Existing Conditions discussion for this report includes the following categories:

- Trail Conditions
- Maintenance
- Funding

This staff report primarily addresses eight Front Country Trails (FCT), under US Forest Service (USFS) jurisdiction or right of way and also provides brief information on urban trails provided by the County of Santa Barbara (County) and the City of Santa Barbara (City). The eight USFS trails include Jesusita, Tunnel, Rattlesnake, West Fork Cold Springs, Cold Springs, McMenemy, San Ysidro, and Romero Trails. A front country trail is defined as a trail on the edge of or beyond the urban limit line at an elevation or where contour intervals would produce a foothill or mountainous landscape. An urban trail is classified as a pathway or trail found within the urban area. An urban trail may provide access through and between neighborhoods, pathways to schools, access to open space areas and points of interest, and beach access ways, among others. This staff report covers only approved front country trails, recognized by the USFS, City and

County, and does not include illegal or casual trails that may occur within the FCTs vicinity.

Current Conditions of Front Country Trails

The following provides a general overview of typical USFS FCT conditions. There is a general similarity between the trails that make up the FCT System. All trails historically begin at the edge of the urban interface at an approximate elevation of 1,000 feet. Five FCTs reach the ridge of the Santa Ynez Range. The average length of each of those trails is 3.5 miles, with an average elevation gain of 2,400 feet, for an average elevation gain of roughly 685 feet per mile. A typical FCT begins in a shady canopied canyon bottom, with riparian vegetation and numerous water crossings. Trails leave the canyon to either access the ridge top or adjoining trails systems, and pass through geological formations of Coldwater and Matilija Sandstone and, in the higher elevations, Cozy Dell Shale. It is through this environment that trails will pass through a continuous bed of coastal chaparral. Coastal chaparral, low-lying grasses, and scrubs can easily grow 8-12 inches per season.

Steeper FCT sections are in fair condition, considering the amount and types of use, although significant soil loss has occurred along some trails. Trails this steep would be unstable in other soil types; however, the FCTs are fairly compacted in most areas. Natural mass wasting (slope failure) events in the area seem to be a substantial source of soil loss and sedimentation of surface waters. On many trail segments within the Matilija Sandstone, the trail has since reached bedrock with little annual soil displacement taking place. The inability to maintain a consistent maintenance regime on the heavily visited FCTs has been a major contributing factor in trail bed and trail tread degradation.

Infrastructure Database

In 2001-2002, the USFS began a data collection process, referred to as the Infrastructure Database (Infra Database). Trail features such as water bars, switchbacks, signs, and rock walls were measured during the data collection process, and geo-referenced using global positioning system (GPS) technology. A maintenance or repair value and the general condition of linear events, such as brushing needed and the condition of the trail tread, was assigned to all features.

An example of information from the Infra Database has been provided in the Task Force's Resources Manual Binder, under the Trail Maintenance tab. Please see the three Jesusita Selected Feature maps. The maps are copies of an existing Arch View Spatial Mapping program, best viewed on a computer due to the multiple layers of information. Also see the example table containing trails features and estimates of hours of work required. These items were an early attempt to quantify the work needed; such as the brushing hours needed on a certain trail with a geo-reference to the map where the trail section is located. All this data has been uploaded into the National Recreation Trails Infrastructure Data Base. The Infra Database information has not kept up with existing conditions due to lack of consistent USFS Staff time and the dollars necessary to perform updates and trail condition surveys.

Examples of current FCT Conditions

Two examples of current FCT conditions are provided in Attachments 1 – 3 to this report. The first example provides information collected by volunteers, and the second example was prepared with Special Federal funding for storm damage. Please note that none of this information was the result of USFS Annual Allocation dollars. The Tunnel Trail TOPO! GPS Data example (Attachment 1) was prepared by volunteers Tony Biegen and Jim Childress (2004) and includes measured distance, trail width, and percent slope of the trail bed at GPS recorded distances along the trail. This example demonstrates where the current trail width and slope are located. It is noted that the average percent trail slope over the total distance (3.58 miles) equals 16.50 % and the average trail width equals 34 inches.

Ray Ford and Paul Herning, of the Los Padres Forest Association (LPFA), prepared two documents that show the most current record of FCT existing conditions. This information is provided in the Jesusita Trail Management and Rehabilitation Plan (Plan; Attachment 2) and the table of linear trail features (Attachment 3). In the Plan, LPFA is requesting authorization to perform trail maintenance and reconstruction work to bring the Jesusita trail closer to standard. These two documents will serve several purposes. First, the Plan will serve as the financial agreement to authorize spending of federally earmarked funding to correct 2005 flood damaged trails. Second, the linear features table provides a clear picture of the work to be conducted, and if the proposed work is following the authorized level of ground disturbance. Last, the linear features table permanently records and locates, on the ground, trail features and the needed prescription to make repairs. The LPFA documents may serve as templates for future FCT work products, in the event that FCT volunteer work opportunities or special funding arise.

Maintenance of Front Country Trails

USFS FCT maintenance work in 2007, as in the past, will be primarily accomplished by volunteer efforts. The exception is the above-mentioned LPFA project to repair Storm Damage that came with special funding. The USFS has not fielded a trail maintenance crew in over 10 years, as mentioned in the Trail Maintenance Assessment for fiscal year 2007, located in the Task Force Resources Manual binder. Two schedules of volunteer Trail Work Dates and Locations (2007) have been provided for review including the Santa Barbara Mountain Bike Trail Volunteers (Attachment 4) and the Volunteer Wilderness Rangers, a chapter of the LPFA (Attachment 5). Please note that not all these scheduled events will take place on FCTs.

Front country volunteer projects are typically 6-hour, one-day events, held on a weekend. Most often, volunteers concentrate their efforts in cutting brush and in removing trail obstacles, such as, shoveling slough and shale off the trail bed or removing rocks and earth slides. Much of the brush cutting is done with loppers and handsaws due to the USFS restrictions on the use of power equipment by volunteers. In the fall months, a greater effort is made to clean and service water bars and drainage dips.

Mandated environmental requirements, such as those for Heritage (Cultural) Resources compliance, are sometimes necessary prior to trail re-alignment and re-construction. These requirements further add to the backlog of deferred USFS maintenance. The Trail Maintenance Protocols for Heritage Compliance (March 2006), agreed upon trail maintenance protocols, has been provide for review (Attachment 6). Some trail maintenance activities can only be carried out in areas that have been adequately surveyed for Cultural Resources. Activities described in the first protocol, Light Trail Maintenance, do not require Cultural Resource surveys. The USFS is in the process of surveying all trails within the Trail System, but adequate surveys are lacking for a number of FCTs. Lack of funding and the availability of archeological specialist time has been a limiting factor. Trail reconstruction activities or new trail re-routes outside of the established trail Clearing Limits, in most cases, will necessitate further archeological survey to allow for ground disturbing activities. . For the most part, routine trail maintenance by volunteers has been restricted to activities described in the protocol. Those Light Trail Maintenance Activities include:

- Slide and Slough Removal
- Clearing and Grubbing
- Brushing and logging out
- Clearing and Cleaning water bars
- All the above activities to occur within the Clearing Limits

The construction of new trails and significant routing of trail segments would also require further National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) documentation. That documentation would also require biological, botanical, and heritage resources facilitated review.

National Trail Management Classes

Trail Classes have been assigned to all National system trails, in an ongoing effort to establish National trail standards and related cost to meet national quality standards. A matrix document of trail classes, National Trail Management Classes (Updated 6/28/2004), is provided in Attachment 7. The FCT system is assigned the Trail Class 3, Developed/Improved Trail, as listed on the matrix and according to the National Recreation Trails Infrastructure Database (aka Infra Database). At the local level, the decision to include the additional criteria for Pack and Saddle Trails, page 3 of Attachment 7, was applied for developing the trail prescriptions.

The USFS preferred condition for the management of the FCTs has historically been to maintain at a level to meet the need for equestrian use. Typical equestrian trail maintenance and design standards, referenced in Forest Service Trails Management Handbook (FSH 2309.18 – 2.31b), recommends the following standards:

- Maximum Grade 25% at length of 300 feet;
- Clearing Width 4 to 3 feet from centerline of trail, for a total clearing width of 8 feet;
- Clearing Height 10 feet; and
- Tread width 24 inches.

Two exhibits from the Standard Specifications for Construction of Trails are included in Attachments 8 and 9 (Clearing Limits and Typical Trail Cross Sections).

The above listed equestrian trail specifications are included in the Infra Database as an additional measure of cost to bring a trail to standard and also attempts to quantify the annual cost to maintain the trail to standard. Please note that the following information from the Infra Database is from five to six years ago (2001-2002) and includes equestrian specifications. As an example, for the Jesusita trail, the cost to meet the national standard for deferred maintenance (to bring to standard) is \$33,203 and once the trail is to standard, there is an estimated annual maintenance cost of \$3,568 to maintain the national standard. Although the outdated data is somewhat flawed by the need for constant and diligent upward reporting, the report represents a “snap-shot” of prior conditions, maintenance needs and cost at that time.

Trails Maintenance Funding

A five-year USFS funding table is attached and includes Annual Allocation, Special Funding and Trail Miles Completed categories (Attachment 10). At a glance, it is easy to see the steady decline in the congressional allocation for funding for local trails. This USFS budget line item began to drop incrementally five years ago. The current allocation of \$22,700 is down over 80% over the five-year period.

For the first three years, 2003-2005, the USFS was able to maintain funding for two programs of long standing: a USFS regular water bar crew; and a Summer Youth trail crew. These programs were an integral part of the annual operating plans for trail maintenance for over 15 years. The water crew concentrated almost entirely on maintaining the water drainage structures on district trails, with a primary emphasis on the 1,000 water bars and drainage structures on the Front County Trails. This work took place in the fall and winter of every season. The Summer Youth Crew was established under a Cost-Share agreement where by their organization made an equal financial match in a combination of hours and dollars to help leverage costs to accomplish trail maintenance projects.

Special Funding, such as the Santa Cruz Trail Capital Investment Project (CIP), was secured through USFS Regional Office competition for a pool of annually funded dollars for major trail improvements. This trail reconstruction funding currently does not exist for future funding opportunities. The district will complete the reconstruction project, Santa Cruz Trail CIP, in the spring of this year. The bulk of the labor required to complete the three-year project will be accomplished through a Participating Agreement between the USFS and the California Conservation Corps. Note that during the first two years of this CIP, the district was able to augment salaries to manage the project.

Special Funding for Storm Damage 2005, a special congressional allocation, was shared between the LPFA and the Summer Youth Crew, but no funding was available for USFS personnel. The Summer Youth Crew work and funding was completed at the end of last summer. Funding still remains to continue work with the LPFA on FCTs.

This funding should be secure for the life of the project, although it is anticipated that the remaining projects will be completed by the end of September.

At the current funding level for the Trails program, the Santa Barbara Ranger District is unable to meet most fixed costs including salaries, vehicles, and administration costs, and has begun to downsize accordingly. Some temporary fiscal relief is possible by shifting more personnel time and vehicle costs into the general Recreation/Wilderness/Facilities budget, but this in turn reduces staff time to administer the Trails program.

The last section of the Trail Funding Table contains a five-year trail maintenance accomplishment display. The district has been very fortunate to have the vast network of dedicated volunteers primarily responsible for many of the trail maintenance miles reported. As a final note, due to budgetary reductions, the district has a reduced trail maintenance target of 15 miles for 2007.

County Urban Trails

County trails considered in this staff report are found in the urban area of Montecito, Summerland and Carpinteria and are generally in good condition. Most of these urban trails do not receive the number of users as the FCTs maintained by the USFS. The Montecito Trails Foundation historically has performed the routine regular maintenance of the trails within County jurisdiction. The County occasionally assists in the maintenance, on an as needed basis, to address emergency situations.

City Urban Trails

City trails considered in this staff report include those in Parma Park and Rattlesnake Trail. Vegetative communities surrounding City trails are similar to those discussed for USFS FCTs. Trails pass through geological formations of Rincon shale, Sespe fluvial deposits and Vaqueros sandstone. Trail conditions at Parma Park are excellent. Trails are used by hikers and equestrians, with limited biking opportunities along the Parma Park fire road. There are six miles of trails at Parma Park with 31 trails and spurs. Signs are included at trail heads.

Parma Park trails maintenance is performed by City staff, City sub-contractors, and volunteers and is funded by the Parma Park Trust. Trails maintenance is performed two to three times a year by contract labor, with the latest maintenance occurring in January 2007. Maintenance at trail heads, such as trash removal, is performed by City staff on a weekly basis. Additionally, Parma Park is subject to vegetative fuels management according to the City's Wildland Fire Plan. Guidelines for Parma Park trails management can be found in the Parma Open Space Resource Management Guide (2003). Maintenance of Rattlesnake Trail is a part of the City Park and Recreation Department budget.

The City is responsible for the maintenance of a small section of Rattlesnake Trail, beginning at the trailhead adjacent to Skofield Park and extending 1/8 mile north. The

trailhead is signed. Rattlesnake Trail provides a connection to other foothill and FCTs. No trail maintenance work has been performed along Rattlesnake Trail in the past few years.

The City Parks and Recreation Department is subject to City permitting and California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) standards, along with the permitting requirements of other Federal and State agencies for work performed within those agencies' jurisdiction. The City may be required to provide studies prior to trail work, similar to the Cultural Resources and NEPA requirements provided in the USFS discussion below.

Constraints/Limitations

The primary constraint to trails maintenance is a lack of funding and a lack of volunteers, with the exception of Parma Park trails. As previously stated, the USFS has seen a decline in funding over the past five years. Current USFS funding provides barely enough for staff to supervise volunteers. There is a significant maintenance backlog through-out FCTs. Even if volunteers were available, some trail work is constrained due to the requirement for special studies, such as archaeological or biological surveys and reports.

- ATTACHMENTS:**
1. Tunnel Trail TOPO! GPS Data
 2. Jesusita Trail Management and Rehabilitation Plan
 3. Table of linear trail features
 4. Santa Barbara Mountain Bike Trail Volunteers Work Dates
 5. Volunteer Wilderness Rangers Work Dates
 6. Trail Maintenance Protocols for Heritage Compliance
 7. National Trail Management Classes
 8. Clearing Limits
 9. Typical Trail Cross Sections
 10. Forest Service funding table

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